

UNITED STATES ARMY CHAPLAIN SCHOOL

HOW TO INITIATE A RECRUITING PROGRAM TO ATTRACT  
SPANISH-SPEAKING CATHOLIC PRIESTS/SEMINARIANS TO  
THE MILITARY CHAPLAINCY

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## PREFACE

Our efforts to research the topic, in addition to the sources mentioned at the end of the paper, consisted of letter inquiries and personal interviews in three areas: 1) investigation of the need for and opportunities of Spanish-speaking chaplains in the military service; 2) programs and services provided to the Spanish-speaking in the civilian community; 3) the status of and prospects for the Spanish-speaking program in the armed forces.

In these areas we are grateful for the cooperation and assistance of the following: Monsignor Joseph F. Marbach, Chancellor of the Military Ordinariate; Ch (COL) Paul J. LeBlanc, Fort Monmouth, N. J.; Ch (CPT) Frans Kasteel, Army Chaplain School; Father John P. O'Brien, Director of the Spanish Apostolate for Brooklyn diocese; Major General Verne L. Bowers, the Adjutant General of the Army; Mr. Kenneth A. Weber, Army Chaplain School Information Officer; Ch (CMDR) Thomas J. Hilferty, Bureau of Naval Personnel; Ch (COL) Robert F. Overman, Chief of Personnel Air Force; Mr. Melvin Jenkins, Information Officer Army Recruiting Office, Fort Wadsworth, N. J.; Ch (COL) Walter E. Casey and Ch (MAJ) Luke F. Sullivan, Personnel Division, Army Chief of Chaplain's Office.

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## I. THE NEEDS FOR AND OPPORTUNITIES OF THE SPANISH-SPEAKING CATHOLIC CHAPLAIN

There were two questions upper-most in our mind as we reported to Fort Gordon, Georgia for our first assignment as an army chaplain: "What is a Yankee like ourselves doing down here below the Mason-Dixon line and will we be competent in handling racial issues?" When we faced our first group of Catholic basic trainees at the weekly chaplain's orientation, these questions were displaced by a real and more baffling one. "What are we going to do with our Spanish-speaking soldiers?" That week and every week for the nine months of our tour of duty at Fort Gordon, fifty of the two hundred new, Catholic, basic trainees at the chaplain's orientation looked at us and said, "Padre, non comprende!" These Spanish-speaking soldiers were largely draftees from the United States possession of Puerto Rico.

Since none of the Catholic chaplains assigned to the post could speak Spanish, we worked out a bi-lingual confessional aid with the help of a Spanish-speaking chaplain's assistant. He gave the orientation information verbally in

Spanish. Consistently, however, he encountered a minority of Catholic soldiers who had not made their First Communion but who were desirous of so doing. We obtained Spanish adult instructional materials and the chaplain assistant coached those interested in making their First Confession and Communion. In this way some two hundred of these basic trainees persevered and made this important step toward becoming practicing Catholics.

This was, we feel, a gratifying response to an unfortunately primitive Spanish-speaking program. At this same period of time at Fort Jackson, another Catholic chaplain was encountering the same situation. Chaplain Gerald Hughes unlike ourselves could speak Spanish. His program added to the scope of ours, Sunday Mass in Spanish and Spanish Fellowship following the Mass at which Chaplain Hughes conversed casually with them. His efforts met with a correspondingly better response. During the years 1965 through 1968 at Fort Buchanan, Puerto Rico Chaplain James B. Ronan, a Spanish-speaking priest assisted three thousand Spanish-speaking soldiers to their First Confession and Communion. His successor managed to learn Spanish while assigned to Fort Buchanan. During the two years that he was at that post he recorded nine

hundred First Confessions and Communion.<sup>1</sup> Chaplain Frans Kasteel recently returned from a tour of duty in Panama. He reports that he utilized his knowledge of Spanish in his Sunday Spanish Mass, in the novenium program for the dependents and in his counseling and daily contacts with the Spanish-speaking soldiers and dependents of his units.<sup>2</sup> Another Spanish-speaking priest, Chaplain Paul LeBlanc says that he recognized the need and established a Spanish program for his troops while assigned to the 25th Infantry Division, Hawaii in 1956. Later Chaplain LeBlanc reported favorable response to the Spanish Sunday Mass and to Spanish Novenas which he conducted at Fort Hood, Texas.<sup>3</sup>

The special problems and needs of the Spanish-speaking soldier were brought to the attention of the U. S. Army in the article, "No Simple Solution" which appeared in the October issue of Soldier magazine. The writer of this article, Barney Halloran says, "All people of Spanish-speaking heritage

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph F. Harbach, interview held at the office of the Military Ordinariate, New York, N. Y., October 1973.

<sup>2</sup>Frans R. Kasteel, interview held at the United States Army Chaplain School, November 1973.

<sup>3</sup>Paul J. LeBlanc, interview held at the United States Army Chaplain School, November 1973.

have problems in and out of the Army."<sup>4</sup> Any attention given to the Spanish-speaking in the Army by Catholic chaplains would accede to the growing attention being directed toward them in the civilian parishes of our nation. Under Archbishop Robert E. Lucey in 1945 the Catholic bishops of the United States established a Spanish-speaking Committee. In 1970 these bishops initiated an in-depth study of the needs of the Spanish-speaking people. They were aware of their growing need and the responsibility of the Church toward this group which comprizes five per cent of our population. Here are some of the findings of this study:

- 1) Spanish-speaking peoples do not form a homogeneous group.
- 2) As a minority group they experience oppression in our society, suffering from inadequate opportunities at all levels.
- 3) Spanish-speaking people compose about 20 per cent of the Catholic population of the United States.
- 4) At the present time 110 of the 150 dioceses in the United States have a functioning diocesan Spanish-speaking apostolate.<sup>5</sup>

In his article, "No Simple Solution" Barney Halloran maintains that 80 per cent of the Spanish-speaking work in

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<sup>4</sup>Barney Halloran, "No Simple Solution," Soldiers 28, (October 1973): 5.

<sup>5</sup>"A Progress Report, Division for the Spanish-speaking United States Catholic Conference," Washington, D. C., 1971-1973.

unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. Nearly 50 per cent fall below the poverty level of \$3,200.00 a year even though they work.<sup>6</sup> The Modern Volunteer Army should look attractive to them but an attempt to determine if enlistment figures would substantiate the supposition failed.<sup>7</sup> The Department of the Army indicates that 5 per cent of the personnel of the Army are of Spanish descent.<sup>8</sup> Since this is consonant with the percentage of the national population of Spanish origin it is reasonable to estimate that about 20 per cent of the Catholic population in the Army are Spanish-speaking. When you consider that these people are not evenly distributed in the Army but are to be found congregated in larger numbers at posts near the areas of civilian concentration, the Spanish-speaking Catholic chaplain assigned to the posts where this concentration pervades would be specially qualified to render service to a much larger percentage of the Catholic population of the post by virtue of his language qualification.

At the present time ten of the Catholic chaplains on

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<sup>6</sup>Barney Halloren, "No Simple Solution," Soldiers 28, (October 1973): 6.

<sup>7</sup>M. E. Jenkins, personal letter.

<sup>8</sup>Adjutant General United States Army, personal letter.



Active duty in the Army are able to speak Spanish.<sup>9</sup> Even if all of these were assigned to posts in the areas of greatest need this would fall about 60 per cent below the desirable number.

The Spanish-speaking soldier is faced with the same handicaps in the Army which he faces in the civilian situation. Major Vince Gomez of the Army's Office of Race Relations and Equal Opportunity says:

Our office is designed to serve all minorities equally. The Spanish-speaking minority is the second largest minority in the Army. Our investigation into the problems of Spanish-speaking soldiers is in the embryonic stage but moving out.<sup>10</sup>

Barney Halloran exemplifies what Major Gomez is discovering in the following passage:

Sergeants still insist about all their Spanish-speaking troops really knowing English but ignoring it even though it isn't true. Officers will hawl out Spanish-speaking troops for not staring them in the eye, not realizing that the reaction isn't personal but cultural. "Well, if they want their own culture so bad, send 'em back to Spain." But they grew up in Texas. "If they don't want to learn English, the hell with 'em." But they do; the schools won't teach it so children can learn. No simple solution.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Walter E. Casey, personal letter.

<sup>10</sup> Barney Halloran, "No Simple Solution," Soldiers 28, (October 1973): 13.

<sup>11</sup> Barney Halloran, "No Simple Solution," Soldiers 28, (October 1973): 16.

## II. PROBLEMS IN INITIATING A RECRUITING PROGRAM FOR CATHOLIC SPANISH-SPEAKING PRIESTS

The Spanish-speaking priests who are now working in the Spanish apostolate in the civilian parishes and religious orders are in short supply and are a hard-to-replace group. In the Brooklyn diocese the director, Father John O'Brien is endeavoring to respond to the increased emphasis which the bishops are placing on the Spanish program. It is difficult to imagine that a recruiting program would be very successful when, in a diocese which is relatively well supplied with clergy, Father O'Brien says he is already in need of thirty more priests in his Spanish program. Furthermore, one hundred and sixty of the priests involved in the Brooklyn and New York dioceses Spanish work are not eligible for the military chaplaincy because they are not citizens of the United States but post graduate students who are here only temporarily. It is encouraging to note that Brooklyn diocese now requires its seminarians to learn to speak either Spanish or Italian as a

condition for ordination to the priesthood.<sup>12</sup> It is safe to generalize that religious orders and other dioceses are facing similar circumstances.

Whose job is it to recruit Catholic chaplains, Spanish-speaking or otherwise for the Army chaplaincy? This question brings up another considerable problem area. It is not the Army Chaplain Branch's job. Indicates Chaplain (COL) Walter E. Casey, Director of Personnel. He makes this clear in response to our inquiry. He says that chaplains' recruiting is a function of the Church with Indorsing Agencies.<sup>13</sup> In the case of the Catholic Church that agency is the Military Ordinariate. Its only effort to recruit Catholic priests for the chaplaincy is through the annual Report of their office to the bishops and Superiors of the religious orders. This is a combined report and an statement of the Military Ordinary, Terrance Cardinal Geronzi makes a request for the needs of the Air Force and Navy as well as the Army. Mention is always made that the Army is especially short of Catholic priests. When we entered the service our own bishop encouraged me to enter the Army for this reason. We entered the Army knowing

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<sup>12</sup>John P. O'Brien, interview held at the office of the Spanish Apostolate, Brooklyn N. Y., October 1973.

<sup>13</sup>Walter E. Casey, personal letter.

that the Air Force and Navy were the prestige services and held an overwhelming popularity in the minds of the priests of our own diocese. The Air Force and Navy have historically been able to exist on the strength of a volunteer recruiting program while the Army has had to draft in every area except that of the chaplain branch itself. The difference in prestige may be intrinsic to these branches of the service or at least partially derived from the effects of years of recruiting. This seems to be born out by the fact that at the present time the Navy has 96 per cent of its authorized number of Catholic chaplains and the Air Force has 91 per cent. In striking contrast, the Army has 330 of its 550 authorized active duty Catholic chaplains for a percentage of 61 per cent.<sup>14</sup>

In our inquiries we discovered that the Air Force and Navy unlike the Army Chaplain Branch do conduct their own recruiting programs for Catholic priests.<sup>15</sup> The attempt to get the details of their recruiting programs resulted in only general references to these programs.<sup>16</sup> The existence of

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<sup>14</sup>Luke F. Sullivan, interview held at the Chief of Chaplain's Office, Washington, D. C., October 1973.

<sup>15</sup>Paul J. LeBlanc, interview held at the United States Army Chaplain School, November 1973.

<sup>16</sup>Thomas J. Hilferty and Robert F. Overman, personal letters.

these programs is verified by the explicit use of the word "recruit" by both the Air Force and Navy Chief of Chaplains in their letters to the Bishops and religious superiors which are a part of the 1972 Military Ordinariate Report.<sup>17</sup> These recruiting efforts may both complement and stimulate the popularity of the Navy and Air Force.

It was suggested that Catholic chaplains in the Army be encouraged to volunteer their interest in working with the Spanish-speaking and then be sent to a school while on active duty to learn the Spanish language. One such possible school which the military has in operation is the Language Institute at Monterey, California. Courses in Spanish are also offered frequently at the Army Education Centers on many of our posts. This suggestion offers one possible solution to the need for Spanish-speaking priests in the Army but it turns interest away from the concept of recruiting as a solution.

The Official Catholic Directory statistics show the trends on vocations to the Catholic priesthood and the active priests in the United States. These trends do not indicate that the vocation shortage will soon end in the Catholic Church

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<sup>17</sup> Annual Report of the Military Ordinariate United States of America, 1972.

In this country. The decrease in active priests over the last eight years is less than three percent but the decrease in seminarians for the same period is fifty-six per cent.

#### VOCATIONAL TRENDS<sup>18</sup>

PERSONNEL	YEAR	
	1965	1973
Diocesan priest	35,925	36,223
Religious order priests	<u>22,707</u>	<u>20,746</u>
Total	58,632	56,969
Diocesan seminarians	26,762	12,925
Religious order seminarians	<u>22,230</u>	<u>8,855</u>
Total	48,992	21,780

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<sup>18</sup>The Official Catholic Directory (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1965), the general summary; and The Official Catholic Directory (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1973), the general summary.

## III. THE RECRUITING PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

Any remarks in this chapter will be directed toward the Army because the Air Force and Navy already have general recruiting programs for Catholic chaplains and any particular Spanish-speaking recommendations would, in all probability, be applicable in these services as well.<sup>19</sup>

The Spanish-speaking recruiting program, we think, should be simply one adjunct of the general Catholic chaplain recruiting program. Those who are in the work can speak with the greatest realism and enthusiasm of the apostolate to the Spanish-speaking in the Army. The Spanish-speaking Catholic chaplain is in an excellent position to be an effective participant on a part-time basis in recruiting visits to seminaries but also to discuss the chaplaincy with religious superiors, bishops and directors of the Spanish-speaking Bishops' Conference on the national and diocesan levels. Special emphasis would logically be placed on the largest diocesan Spanish programs and areas of Spanish-speaking population concentration.

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<sup>19</sup> Annual Report of the Military Ordinariate United States of America, 1972.

we recommend that a chaplain recruiting film be prepared and be made available to the recruiters who visit seminaries or who give other recruiting orientations.

We are of the conviction that the Army Chaplain Branch can not possibly hope to maintain, let alone improve its Catholic chaplain position unless steps are taken to compete with the recruiting programs of the Air Force and Navy and the traditional higher level of prestige which these services have enjoyed. We must, therefore, recommend that the Army Chaplain Branch adopt an active recruiting policy and program for Catholic chaplains. This would involve but not be limited to identifying and considering what aspects of their recruiting programs would be advantageous for ours.

We feel it wise to concentrate efforts in recruiting upon two areas. 1) The religious orders and dioceses which now are most responsive probably have the smallest shortage of priests and are most sympathetic to our needs. Give them special attention. 2) The religious orders and diocese which have a relatively large number of priests but a small number of them now in the service might be improved. A visit to the religious superior or bishop by a recruiter may identify and breakdown the barriers to greater generosity to our needs. Our chaplains come from 124 of the 150 dioceses in the United



States and from 52 of the 58 religious orders. The 6 leading dioceses supply 20 per cent of our chaplains. These dioceses in order starting from the greatest contributor are Boston, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Brooklyn and Newark. The 6 leading religious orders provide 15 per cent of our chaplains. These in order from the greatest contributor are the Benedictines, Jesuits, Franciscans, Capuchins, Redemptorists and the Marists.<sup>20</sup>

These recruiting recommendations will cost money and will need funding as well as command support. The chaplains who make these visits need to be authorized temporary duty funds and a well-filmed, recruiting film should be considered a basic tool among the recruiting materials. It is further recommended that recruiter chaplains be selected only on a temporary basis and ideally visit seminaries and offices in the diocese or religious order from which they themselves originate. This is recommended in the interests of the freshness of the chaplain's approach and the greater credibility of his impact.

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<sup>20</sup> Annual Report of the Military Ordinariate United States of America, 1972.

## IV. CONCLUSION

We have directed all the foregoing recommendations to the Army Chaplain Branch. We must bear in mind that, at this time, it places this responsibility upon the Military Ordinate. We should, no doubt, consider what the Military Ordinate might do to improve and extend the effectiveness of its recruiting efforts for the army chaplaincy. Frankly, we doubt that much more can or will be done. The staff of the Military Ordinate is civilian. Usually, if you're going to get a job done, you'd best do what you can yourself and not depend on others to solve your problems. If the Army is short of Catholic chaplains it seems that the Army must do its part to solve its problem. This is especially indicated when it is competing for a scarce resource against the other two services which have already adopted this philosophy.

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